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ABSTRACT

Policy-making is viewed as a complex and unorganized process. Several aspects are examined: political, rational, collegial, and eclectic. The political model is chosen as that closest to the educational policy-making process. Theories of that process in higher education institutions are examined. Recommendations for programs to prepare educational administrators for leadership in policy-making include: (1) strengthening the portions of programs concerned with development of information systems within institutions, and the related areas of planning, evaluation, institutional research, and policy analysis; (2) training in conflict management, including organizational change; (3) emphasis on the policy formation process, as distinguished from policy adoption; and (4) encouraging educational leaders to look at their responsibilities broadly, in the context of the interactive systems in which they work. A brief list of references is included. (MSE)

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POLICY MAKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREPARING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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Introduction

In addressing a topic as complex as policy making, it is difficult to know whether it will clarify or confuse matters if one attempts to establish some common ground with respect to terminology. I chose to comment briefly on the general meaning of several key terms as they are used in my paper in the hope this will facilitate communication between us. The first of these is "policy making" and for most of you, the sense in which I am using this term will not be new, even if it is not your personal preference.

Charles E. Lindblom in his book entitled The Policy Making Process, presents a way of looking at this complex phenomenon which he describes as follows:[1]

> We are going to look at policy making as an extremely complex, analytical and political process to which there is no beginning or end, and the boundaries of which are most uncertain. Somehow, a complex set of forces we call "policy making", all taken together, produce effects called "policies".

I chose to use policy making in the sense that Lindblom has described it - complex and unorganized - because this seems to represent best the dynamic nature of the process. And while some of you may be a little uncomfortable with policy making thus conceived, others will see reflected in it vexing realities encountered in the real policy making process. For those who may not be familiar with Lindblom's ideas about policy making, I believe you will find his article, "The Science of Muddling Through", both informative and interesting[2].

The second term, "policy", sounds so confortably familiar that we are prone to think everyone knows what it means. However, as one examines the literature on policy and policy making, it becomes quite clear that the term, policy, is used in somewhat different senses. Frequently it is used synonomously with the word, goal, and in other instances it carries essentially the same meaning as the word, plan. I am using policy to mean... a position or a decision which commits those adopting it to a generally agreed upon course of action, often including the commitment of resources.

The third term is "educational leaders" and I am interpreting this more or less synonomously with educational administrators. Certainly, not all educational leaders come from the ranks of administrators, nor vice versa. However, I have been asked to deal with implications for preparing educational leaders in an administrative program context and this interpretation, therefore, seems to be the most appropriate.

Some Alternative Views of Policy Making

One may reasonably ask what alternative views of policy making have been considered and rejected in arriving at the preference for Lindblom's concept of "muddling through". The Lindblom approach, which I shall hereafter refer to as the political model (the term, model is used in a non-technical sense), makes essentially the same assumption that Aaron Wildavsky does when he states, "different points of view taken by the different groups in government serve to make each group something of a watchdog for certain variables against others".[3] Under these conditions, the rational process is subordinated to the political process and progress in policy making is characterized by uncertainty and incrementalism. Let us consider briefly the applicability of other models to the educational policy making of higher

education.

One of these, the rational model of policy making, gives prominence to processes of logic and analysis rather than to the political process. It assumes that all decisions deal with values and that it is possible, theoretically at least, to identify all values implicit in a decision, determine all policy alternatives leading to these values, and evaluate each alternative in terms of its usefulness in attaining these values. Further, it is assumed that all of this can be done objectively; thus, it is possible to arrive at the one best policy alternative in terms of the values inherent in any particular decision. Although this is an over simplification of the classical rational model, it may serve to point out its great contrast with the political model and perhaps suggest the great difficulties encountered in applying it to the real world of educational policy making.

Although there are a number of alternative ways in which we might look at educational policy making, I will briefly comment on only the rational, collegial and political models before returning to develop the political model in more detail. The collegial model embraces some characteristics of both the political and the rational models though it is distinctly different from either. Applied to the academic world, it assumes that professionals in a university are peers and that the most appropriate way to formulate policy in such circumstances is by deliberation and consensus.
Thus, it rests upon the assumption that a community of peers can reason together and is therefore "rational" in this respect. However, it also provides for interaction and exchange among peers which can influence the outcome or concensus and therefore it also bears some resemblance to the political model.

Certainly, one could make a case for an eclectic view of policy making since each model appears to have both advantages and disadvantages. For example, the rational model, in addition to being unmanagable if all values and

all policy alternatives were to be considered in a given decision, has the further shortcoming of not adequately accounting for the political dynamics which we know to be a critical part of policy making.

The collegial model, which tends to be the most seductive for the university professor, does not appear to adequately provide for resolution of the conflict which inevitibly arises when reasonable peers attempt to reach concensus about controversial matters, e.g. the allocation of scarce resources. Neither does it appear to accommodate realities of policy making which take place outside the university.

Nor does the political model meet all of the criteria we might think important. Its vulnerability to pressure groups can and often does result in policies which fall far short of the publics best interest. For example, it does not guarantee "policy balance" with respect to micro-macro questions as reflected in the centralization-decentralization controversy so common today in higher education.

The acceptance of the political model for purposes of this paper is, therefore, a reflection of its perceived relevance for dealing with educational policy making in higher education rather than a belief that it is intrinsically superior to other models. Let us now consider for a moment how some of the organizational characteristics of the university relate to the policy making process.

The Contemporary University: Bureaucracy or Organized Anarchy

J. Victor Baldridge has presented an interesting and pertinent analysis of College and University Characteristics based upon the research program known as the "Stanford Project on Academic Governance". In one of the publications emerging from this research entitled, Policy Making and Effective Leaderchip, Baldridge summarizes key characteristics associated with the bureaucratic organization as described

by Weber and compares them to university organizational characteristics as revealed by his own research.[4] The Weberian bureaucracy, he reminds us, implies rigidity, clear lines of authority, strict hierarchical command, cohesive organization, and clear goals. He then characterizes the university as being more fluid, confused, blurred lines of authority, fragmented social structure, and ambiguous, changing and contested goals. He concludes that, although the imagery of the bureaucracy does accurately describe some features of universities and colleges, at their core (policy making, teaching and research) they do not resemble the bureaucratic model. Most of us would likely agree that the bureaucratic model does not adequately account for some important features of the university. Let us consider an alternative.

Cohen and March in their book entitled, Leadership and Ambiguity, introduce what they call an "organized anarchy" in attempting to describe the university. One can readily see what they mean by this term from the following paragraph[5].

> In a university anarchy, each individual in the university is seen as making autonomous decisions. Teachers decide if, when and what they want to teach. Students decide if, when and what they want to learn. Legislators and donors decide if, when and what they want to support. Neither coordination nor control is practiced. Resources are allocated by whatever process emerges but without explicit reference to some superordinate goal. The "decisions" of the system are a consequence produced by the system but intended by no one and decisively controlled by no one.

I dare say, most of us would not go as far as Cohen and March have gone in characterizing the university.

However, we might admit that some of what they say has a familiar ring to it. And I would predict that our students would go farther in their agreement. One could even speculate whether the drift toward greater centralized coordination and control of higher education, in the U.S. and in other countries around the world, might reflect the agreement of influential people outside the university with the Cohen and March characterization of the university as an organized anarchy.

Baldridge has formulated a modified version of the Cohen and March characterization which we might more readily accept. He points out that the university does have 1) unclear goals, 2) client service, 3) unclear technology, 4)professional staffing, and 5) environmental vulnerability. Granting that universities also have some common characteristics of bureaucracies, e.g. 1) a state charter, 2) a formal hierarchy, 3) authority relations, 4) rules and regulations, nonetheless the Weberian concept of bureaucracy does not fit their policy making realities. The political model will now be examined more carefully.

Policy Making as a Political Model

In his book, Power and Conflict in the University, Baldridge offers an alternative model of university governance which centers around its policy forming process.[6] Basically, the university is viewed as an open political system similar to a city, state or federal government in the way it arrives at policy decisions. Different interest groups attempt to influence policy formulation to protect or promote their own special interests.

Baldridge identifies several assumptions about the nature of the political process which are implicit in his model and support the notion of its applicability to a university. Let me briefly review these assumptions for you.[7]

1. Most members of the university staff are politically inactive most of the time (inactivity prevails).

2. Even those who are active move in and out of the university decision making process (fluid participation). These two conditions (1+2) combine to permit small political elites to control most major decisions in the university.

3. Colleges and universities are comprised of fragmented interest groups which seek to protect or promote their own interests.

4. Given the fragmented social structure of the university, conflict is normal and can be used as a positive force in the process of organizational change.

5. The formal authority of a university bureaucratic system is serverely limited by political pressures that can be exerted by interest groups.

6. External interest groups are vitally important and can exert great influence upon the university decision making process.

It is not difficult to see how Baldridge's assumptions about the political process relate to his model. We shall therefore turn to a brief consideration of the contextual setting within which educational policy making takes place and the primary actors in the process.

Educational Policy Making: The Arena and Actors.

Having looked at policy making from several conceptual perspectives and chosen one that seems to fit this process reasonably well in universities, let us now consider what constitutes the policy making arena and who are the principal actors within it.

In our world of global communication and great interdependency, it is obvious that influences from all parts of the world can, and sometimes do, influence, educational policy making intended to affect only a single country, part of a country or even a single college or university. However, it is probably true that the largest educational policy making arena is generally national in scope. Consequently, the most important influences and actors affecting policy formulation also operate within this national scope.

Among the major actors are the agencies and staff of federal, state and local government in a bewildering array of executive, legislative and judicial manifestations. There are also innumerable special interest groups of both professional and non-professional varieties. And of course, the people, groups and organs of the university, itself, are involved at all levels, from the individual student and professor to the university president and the governing board.

This is the setting within which educational leaders will function in the policy making process. One can readily understand, therefore, why one observer of this "blooming, buzzing confusion" we call policy making dryly observed, "this is one of those areas where there are more experts than there is demonstrable expertise!" Let us hope that the universities are not contributing to this lack of expertise but to the extent that we concentrate on preparing for policy making that takes place only within the university campus in an atmosphere of intellectual and collegial serenity by applying objective and rational processes, we are undoubtedly missing the mark!

Implications for Preparing Educational Leaders

Against the perspective of policy making thus far established, I would now like to consider the implications for preparing educational leaders. Robert L. Katz in his well known Harvard Business Review article, "Skills of an Effective Administrator", has given us a framework which is useful in

thinking about this task.[8] He divides the skills needed by administrators into three broad categories which he calls technical skills, human relations skills, and conceptual skills. I will comment briefly on each category.

The technical skills are probably the easiest for universities to impart and this may account for their prominence is some programs to prepare administrators. While not entirely technical, much of what we generally refer to as "scientific management" is primarily technical in nature. Systems analysis, Planning, Programming and Budgeting Systems (PPBS), Management by Objectives (MBO), and Cost-Benefit Analysis are good examples. Some aspects of evaluation and planning are also technical and one could identify other components of our programs which are largely technical. Certainly, technical aspects are needed but it is worth noting that Katz believes the category of technical skills is most important to administrators in lower level positions. When we refer to "educational leaders", probably we do not have in mind this level of administration. We may, however, have this in mind when we refer to "the technocrats".

Katz's second skill category is human relations and, as the term implies, these skills relate directly to interpersonal, inter-group, intra-group and individual-group aspects of the administrator's work. As we might expect, Katz regards these skills as important for all levels of administration but probably most important for middle-level administrators. While not as easy to impart as technical skills, most universities do have a variety of developmental opportunities available for students who wish to understand this dimension of administration better or improve their effectiveness in working with groups and individuals in the organizational setting.

Conceptual skills, Katz's third category, is probably most important for high level administrators and therefore would seem to be most critical in our preparation of educational leaders for effectiveness in policy making roles. Conceptual skills relate to the individual's ability

to see clearly an opportunity or problem, to recognize and differentiate between its critical and unimportant elements, to generate diverse and creative alternatives for problem resolution, and to anticipate not only the immediate and short term but the remote and long term consequences of pursuing a particular course of action. One can readily see why such skills would be important to high level administrators but it is equally easy to understand why these skills would be the most difficult to impart. Regretably ,Katz concludes that they are difficult to develop and he isn't optimistic about how much they can be modified in the mature adult.

Reconmendations and Conclusions

In each of Katz's skill categories, it seems to me that we need to analize what we are presently providing in our university programs to prepare educational leaders and how we may need to modify present practices. With this in mind, I offer the following reconmendations:

In the technical skill area, it is obvious that educational leaders are increasingly dependent upon the availability of adequate information for effective decision making. Therefore, it is recommended that those aspects of our programs which prepare for development and use of information systems be strengthened. Directly related to this area are the important administrative activities of planning, evaluation, institutional research, policy analysis, etc. Conceding that the political process does not embrace these facets of administration as the "heart of policy making" they are, nonetheless, much too important to neglect! I fear we may have done so.

In the category of human relations skills, one aspect which seems critically important but inadequately attended, is the matter of conflict managemnent. We know that conflict is ever present in organizational life today in all of its manifestations, i. e. interpersonal, intra-group, etc.

Therefore, I recommend that more attention be given to this dimension of leadership preparation, including the process of organization change.

At the conceptual level, I believe there could be no more deserving target for additional effort than the policy making process, itself. Granting that this is an area where there are more experts than demonstrable expertise, we must not retreat from it. Nor dare we perpetuate myths about policy making occurring primarily in meetings of university regents and trustees. We must distinguish more clearly between the act of policy adoption and the process of policy making. And we must cease to emphasise "policy implementation" to the neglect of "policy advocacy" in our preparative program. The educational leader must be well prepared for both!

Finally, I believe that we must emphasize those aspects of administrators preparation which will help our educational leaders to have a global review of their responsabilities, an undesrstanding of the open, interactive and interdependent systems within which they work, a tolerance for ambiguity and conflict and a profound commitment to help make this a better world in which to live through better education.

Conclusion

In conclusion may I suggest that we think about the policy making challenges confronting educational leaders today and in the future and make every effort to prepare future leaders well for this vitally important task. We do not wish to conclude, tomorrow, as did our philosophic cartoon friend, Pogo, that "we have met the enemy and he is us".

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